

Metropolitan Area Transportation Planning for Healthy Communities

This white paper by the USDOT's Volpe National Transportation Systems Center for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Planning develops a framework for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to use to successfully consider health throughout the transportation planning process. The report is a resource for transportation planners, their transportation partners, and new partners in the health field.

The report explores how health can effectively be incorporated in metropolitan transportation planning through four case studies:

- Nashville Area MPO
- Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)
- Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)
- San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)

A Holistic Approach

The research team applied a holistic approach to assess the different aspects of health that MPOs can include in explicit goals to improve community health. These include safety, air quality, physical activity, and access to health-related destinations. The report's framework will assist MPOs and partners to incorporate health considerations at each stage of the planning process (see diagram below-left).

Conclusions

The research identifies similarities in the planning processes, strategies, and challenges of MPOs that consider health in transportation planning. The MPOs studied:

Build partnerships with local or State organizations with health-related missions, starting with communication and coordination, which can lead to structural changes, including committee membership or agreements for cooperation.

Leverage federal funds from agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to initiate transportation and health working relationships that can evolve into long-term partnerships.

Foster support both with the MPO board and the community by demonstrating the relationship between transportation and health and how a health focus enhances other MPO and community goals.

Adopt an incremental approach to integrating health into transportation planning activities, building confidence within the MPO and the region that health can be added as a goal without adversely affecting pursuit of core transportation goals and responsibilities.

